

October 26 2011 Island Tides Article

Moving toward a dream – an affordable housing community on Galiano Island
> By Suzanne Fournier and Art Moses

> Galiano Island is a remarkable place to live, but for young people or anyone who chooses an island lifestyle over a higher off-island income, home ownership is fast becoming a dream that's out of reach. The Galiano community doesn't want to become a Whistler in the Salish Sea, a resort where those who live and work there can't afford to buy and are forced to vacate rental housing for the lucrative, albeit seasonal, visitor influx.

> A determined group of Galiano residents, with support from a local landowner, and help from zoning provisions in the island's new Official Community Plan is taking significant steps toward realizing that dream, an affordable housing project for island young people in the business centre of the island.

> The Galiano Land and Community Housing Trust (GL&CHT) has applied to the Galiano Island Local Trust Committee to rezone a 10-acre parcel to Community Facility-Affordable Housing. It hopes to have the application proceed through to first reading by the LTC meeting in December. The group has an agreement to purchase the land, which is located behind the Daystar Market and next to the Page Drive seniors' residence, near the centrally-located intersection of Porlier Pass Dr. and Georgeson Bay Road. The site is near stores, restaurants and other amenities, like the pub, hardware store and the South End community hall.

> Galiano business owner Tom Hennessey says the rezoning application asks for increased density on the 4 acres of the lot which is currently zoned Rural Residential. (The rest of the lot, owned by the Konantz/Bice family, is in the Agricultural Land Reserve.) The rezoning would mean about 15 dwellings on the site. The increased density would be similar to that in effect at the nearby seniors' residence.

> The details have not all been finalized, but the economics of the project would look essentially like this: VanCity Savings Credit Union has agreed to advance a mortgage for the \$280,000 purchase price, with the owners agreeing to donate \$80,000 to a local non-profit charitable organization which in turn would buy part of the ALR section of the property for a community garden, create a publicly accessible nature path and dedicate it in honour of the owners' family. The \$80,000 would then be paid back to VanCity to reduce the size of the mortgage.

- > In turn GL&CHT will lease the housing sites to young families for \$200/month. The families would then build their own homes on the site and create a model sustainable affordable community.
- > So far seven people have filled out applications and five more are interested.
- > “Children of island families who can’t get additional density on their family’s land would be the highest priority,” Hennessey says. “We want to hold the community together.”
- > Next would be islanders having difficulty staying on their land as their income shrinks, and then young people who come to the island, fall in love with it, but for whom the cost of land is prohibitive.
- > Hennessey says the community loan fund is willing to lend up to \$10,000 for construction of houses in the development.
- > Hennessey is optimistic the LTC will approve the project.
- > “The new Official Community Plan is great,” Hennessey says. “The Galiano LTC has been very much attuned to the needs of the community for affordable housing and has included many helpful new provisions for affordable housing in the new OCP.
- > “This project is not just good for the people who will have a home in it, but will be a benefit for the whole community; it will keep young families on the island. We need the energy of young people. “If we don’t do something soon Galiano will become a summer camp for rich people.”
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